NIGERIA’S THIRD-GENERATION LITERATURE
CONTENT AND FORM

Ode Ogede
Nigeria’s Third-Generation Literature

This lively and timely book addresses broad theoretical issues surrounding the evolution and characteristics of Nigeria’s third-generation literature. By sifting through the vast panorama of Nigerian literary history, Ode Ogede tries to discern patterns. He affirms that the third-generation literature emerged between the late 1980s and the early 1990s and is marked by expressive modes and concerns distinctly different from those of the preceding era.

Nigeria’s third-generation literature reflects new sensibilities and anxieties about the country’s changing fortunes in the post-colonial era. The literature of the third generation is startling in its candidness, irreverence as well as the brutal self-disclosure of its characters, and it is governed by an unusually wide-ranging sweep in narrative techniques. Six key texts of the oeuvre in particular are the focus of the investigation: Maria Ajima’s *The Web*, Okey Ndibe’s *Foreign Gods, Inc.*, Teju Cole’s *Open City*, Chika Unigwe’s *On Black Sisters Street*, Lola Shoneyin’s *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi’s Wives*, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *The Thing Around Your Neck*. The texts interpret contemporary corruption and other unspeakable social malaise; together, they point to the exciting future of Nigerian literature, which has always been defined by its daring creativity and inventive expressive modes. Even conventional storytelling strategies receive revitalizing energies in these angst-driven narratives, the examination establishes.

This book will be of interest to students and researchers of contemporary African literature, Sociology, Gender and women’s studies, and post-colonial cultural expression more broadly.

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Nigeria’s Third-Generation Literature
Content and Form

Ode Ogede
This book is affectionately dedicated to the memory of:

Professor Eldred Durosimi Jones who, in 1984, sent me my first publication acceptance letter that instantly made me believe in myself;

Professor Samuel Omo Asein, my external examiner, who saw promise in a young graduate student many, many years ago and birthed a career;

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My overwhelming debt is to my lord and savior Jesus Christ, the king of kings and the maker of the heavens and the earth and all that there is in them. Apostle Paul, writing to the Romans, attests: “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulations, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8: 35–39).

Throughout, my Five Oaks Seventh-Day Adventist Church family has anchored me in the word of God, the Bible, and I am grateful for this spiritual source of strength.
1 New Wines and Old and New Bottles: Art and the Pulse of the Nation

The object of this book is to throw some light on the thematic and the stylistic nuances that define Nigeria's third-generation literature. That genre emerged in the 1980s, marking a substantial shift in literary explorations of social and political life in Africa. The book's arguments are that to read this literature is not only to encounter some of the country's most innovative writing but also to run into a variety of stories of a failed nation state, all pointing to very awful realities. Some of the authors that are discussed give attention to the devastating effects of economic marginalization, immigration (or we might call it exile), oppression, and exploitation of women through the institutions of prostitution and polygyny. Quite a few enlist their narratives in a mission to paint pictures of the nature of the terror of the Islamic insurgency, the new wave of Christian fundamentalism, kidnappings, and the resurgent new mercantilism. Others, yet, chronicle the spate of corruption, police brutality, armed robbery, ritual murder, sectarian violence, and the culture of insecurity and mismanagement that make living in Nigeria feel like being in hell for many people. The looming shadow of the Nigeria-Biafra war of 1967–1970 that won't go away is incipiently at the background of the social turbulence of this era.

By all account a case can be made that Nigeria meets the definition of a failed nation state. This republic for most of its existence has not lived up to the expectation of its citizens to deliver public services to them, fueling profound and extended dissatisfaction among the population. In studying the third-generation literature one notices that it is a response to crises in all the modes of existence during an exceptionally fated age, and one will inevitably find its most dominant distinguishing stylistic feature to be worry. The anxiety is sometimes cloaked as subdued outrage or exilic angst. At all times the writers articulate this frustration by employing and breathing new life into the conventional structures of literature: allegory, anecdote, emblem, fable, folktale, parable, personal testimony, magical realism, mock-epic, and other literary forms.

The method employed in the book’s investigation of this literature is both critical and explanatory within the epistemology of close reading and the sociological approach, grounded in the notion that one can best appreciate any nation’s literature's accomplishment by placing it in the context of its literary history. In pursuit of this objective, an attempt is first made to engage the extensive writings

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on age patterns in Nigerian and African literature with concrete references to literary texts. Moreover, for mapping out the differences between the generations to take shape, it bears specifying what can be said to be unique to each generation within the overlapping techniques and thematic concerns. Within this exercise, an overarching account of the context of the third-generation literature begins to unfold itself. After broaching the issue of the increasingly diminishing and not on a few occasions outright devaluation of evaluative criteria accompanying approaches to Nigerian literature, the focus shifts to the highly vexed topic of gender representation. The deliberation closes with a consideration of the contributions of third-generation literature.

As anyone with even a nodding acquaintance with Nigeria knows, the histories of the country and its literature are embossed with major literary honors. Remarkably, generation after generation, Nigerian writers continue to make a mark all over the world. The poetry of Christopher Okigbo and Wole Soyinka; Okinba Launko’s verse; the parables of D.O. Fagunwa, Amos Tutuola, and Chinua Achebe; Onitsha Market Popular Literature; Ben Okri’s modern ghost stories; the classical drama of Wole Soyinka, Ola Rotimi, and John Pepper Clark; and Femi Osofisan’s popular dramatic art, all testify to the scope and scale of experimentation in Nigerian letters.

It is a thing of wonder and awe to behold the constant paradigm shifts in Nigerian writing. Both in African-language and European-language texts, there is always an element of surprise in Nigerian literature. Innovation is visible whether one is referring to Igbo-language writer Pita Nwana’s efforts at mixed forms in mother-tongue creative writing, utilizing proverbs, wise sayings, prayers, and invocations, or looking at D.O. Fagunwa’s Yoruba-language creative writing. This extends to the deformed and highly unconventional English language of Amos Tutuola’s bush ghost fiction in his The Palm-Wine Drinkard and His Dead Palmwine Tapster in the Dead’s Town and My Life in the Bush of Ghosts or Gabriel Okara’s poetry of The Fisherman’s Invocations, all written in forms of English language which require translation to be comprehensible to someone only versed in the “Queen’s English.”

To the reader’s astonishment, through several decades, Nigerian writers have continued to emerge in their clines with all their insignias of eccentricity, and they have never exhausted new forms to try out. Experimentation is in exhibit whether one is talking about the first-generation writers Amos Tutuola, Chinua Achebe, Christopher Okigbo, Gabriel Okara, Flora Nwapa, Cyprian Ekwenisi, Wole Soyinka, and John Pepper Clark; second-generation authors Ben Okri, Okinba Launko, F. Odun Balogun, Niyi Osundare, Tanure Ojaide, Isidore Okpewho, Kole Omotoso, Paul Ndu, Festus Iyayi, Zainab Alkali, Chimalum Nwankwo; and now the third-generation authors included in this study as well and others like Chris Abani, Heron Habila, Atta Sefi, Helen Oyeyemi, Okoye Ifeoma, Toyin Gabriel-Adewale, Tade Ipadeola, and Amatoritsero Ede. As Nigerian literatures have been marked with epochal variations in subject matter, so they have also always demonstrated massive realignments in technique.
Since its inception, the national character of Nigerian creative writing has accommodated a matrix of forms. These range from mythological poetry to light-hearted verse; eulogy; folk drama; popular traveling theater; folkloric and bush ghost fiction; proverb-laden parables; fables; myths; pastoral tragedy; festival drama; epic saga; funeral dirge; romance fiction; Onitsha Market pamphleteering; epistolary form or letter writing; ritual drama; and poetry in the form of what this author once called “billets of prose.” Most recently, marvelous or magical realist fiction has been added to this long and varied list, even if to some it may bear an uncanny resemblance to where things all began: ghost fiction.

There is a universal realization that many of the developments in cultural monuments seem motivated by reactions to the existing traditions. In regard to this practice, the great Gilbert Highet has much that is useful to say. In a chapter reveally entitled “The Battle of the Books,” in his influential book *The Classical Tradition*, he presciently notes the generational tangles that attend the cultivation of tastes across time periods. The changes in attitudes behind major cultural inventions cannot be ignored, he states. “The very long-drawn-out dispute in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries which agitated not only the world of literature but the worlds of science, religion, philosophy, the fine arts, and even classical scholarship,” he points out, dramatizes the operation of the ordering of tastes, the bumping of heads for what he calls “the transmission of culture.” He emphasizes that “The battle waged in France and England at the turn of the seventeenth century was only one conflict in a great war which has been going on for 2,000 years and is still raging … the war between tradition and modernism; between originality and authority.” The terms of that debate were: “Ought modern writers to admire and imitate the great Greek and Latin writers of antiquity? or have the classical standards of taste now been excelled and superseded? Must we only follow along behind the ancients, trying to emulate them and hoping at most to equal them, or can we confidently expect to surpass them?” (262).

Professor Highet memorably poses the question another way: “In science, in the fine arts, in civilization generally, have we progressed beyond the Greeks and Romans? or have we gone ahead of them in some things, and fallen behind them in others? or are we inferior to them in every respect, half-taught Barbarians using the arts of truly civilized men?” (262). His answer is that within each era people will answer one way or the other. On one side of the debate some will succumb despairingly to the notion of their own inferiority. Overawed and “charmed by the skill, beauty, and power of the best Greek and Roman writing,” they presume that the past “could never be really surpassed, and that modern men should be content to respect it without hope of producing anything better” (262).

However, the moderns disagree with the apologists of the classics. They not only won’t accept their inferiority, but proclaim a superiority based on their own self-authenticating parameters: unfavorably comparing the religious sensibilities and moral bearings, as well as the levels of knowledge of things beyond their own immediate surroundings of the classical writers with those of the moderns;
and finally claiming, paradoxically, the immutability or constancy of some things. This last index is so critically important it deserves elaboration; the idea that “the great things of life, out of which art arises, change very little: love, sin, the quest for honour, the fear of death, the lust for power, the pleasures of the senses, the admiration of nature, and the awe of God” (269). In his accurate explanation, the “ability of men to create works of art out of these universal subjects depends largely on the character of the societies in which they live: their economic structure, their intellectual development, their political history, their contacts with other civilizations, their religion and their morality, the distribution of their population between various classes and occupations and types of dwelling-place, even the climate they enjoy” (269). The examples he offers in defense of the environmental imperative in art are apt. Clearly, to overlook the roles that nurturing, religious, legal, moral, or political prohibitions can play in determinations of the kinds of art a society can or cannot produce is to turn a blind eye to reality—a great mistake one should avoid at all accounts.

That’s why the final assumption those who see themselves at the cutting edge make about the classics is a direct attack, “saying that they were badly written and fundamentally illogical” (270). These modern artists poohpooh the elevated pedestal on which society places tradition, referring to “an exaggerated admiration of the classics” (270). The bohemians belittle the long-established arts and opine that to regard them as infallible, sacrosanct, and above rebuke is nonsensical. As a consequence, a “common expression of this reaction is parody. Parody was common in antiquity, particularly among the Sceptic and Cynic philosophers, who used, by parodying Homer’s greatest lines, to attack his authority, and through him the inviolability of tradition and convention” (270).

The “attacks on the authority of the classics” sum up what Highet dubs “the Battle of the Books,” the practice of interrogation that provides the motivation for inventiveness among the avant-gardists, who are not at all convinced that tradition is above improvement. In the process, the modernists ratify their inclinations to seek renovation of the classics in ways that suit their own tastes and dispositions—aesthetic, spiritual, moral, and even political. He concludes that the good that comes out of this dueling exercise is immense: The modernists “did not succeed in convincing anyone that modern literature, even if elevated by Christian doctrine, must be better than the classics. But the real benefit of the battle for both sides was that it discouraged slavish respect for tradition, and made it more difficult for future writers to produce ‘Chinese copies’ of classical masterpieces, in which exact imitation should be a virtue and original invention a sin … The idea of progress may sometimes be a dangerous drug, but it is often a valuable stimulant; and it is better for us to be challenged to put forth our best, in order to surpass our predecessors, than to be told the race is hopeless” (288).

The case is not different in Nigerian literature with the interaction between old and new works, which brings up the inescapable question of periodization in the country’s literary history, the sense(s) in which the term “generation” is applied in this study, and indeed why it is necessary to establish epochal boundaries. This is
particularly salient because there has been a lot of discussion of generational paradigms in literary studies generally, not least of whether they are even useful at all for reading the overlapping techniques and thematic concerns of literature. In terms of dates and authors, and of concerns that distinguish the generations, Nigerian and African literatures have not been spared from these often-heated debates.6

Among all these discussions, this statement of Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane is the most germane to this book’s purposes. “Cultural seismology—the attempt to record the shifts and displacements of sensibility that regularly occur in the history of art and literature and thought—habitually distinguishes three separate orders of magnitude,” they write:7

At one end of the scale are those tremors of fashion that seem to come and go in rhythm with the changing generations, the decade being the right unit for measuring the curves that run from first shock to peak activity and on to the dying rumbles of derivative Epigonentum. To a second order of magnitude belong those larger displacements whose effects go deeper and last longer, forming those extended periods of style and sensibility which are usefully measured in centuries. This leaves a third category for those overwhelming dislocations, those cataclysmic upheavals of culture, those fundamental convulsions of the creative human spirit that seem to topple even the most solid and substantial of our beliefs and assumptions, leave great areas of the past in ruins (noble ruins, we tell ourselves for reassurance), question an entire civilization or culture, and stimulate frenzied rebuilding.

To be sure, when literary scholars talk about creative works and writers in generational terms, they are seldom in agreement about the indices for establishing how literary “generations” are defined, either in terms of thematic and stylistic contents of texts in the literary histories of continents, nations, and regions or of time capsules and their relevance to literary categorization. A social generation lasts fifteen to thirty years, for example. Is it fair to apply that time frame to literature as well; to consider literary generations as taking equivalent time spans? Also, in literary history, are there any clear-cut breaks in subject matters and technical properties of literature through such movements of time in history, across time periods?

In wrestling with this subject, relating to the making of traditions, however, Bradbury’s and McFarlane’s use of terminology usually reserved for natural occurrences like earthquakes and volcanoes has instructively formulated an important strategy to help us comprehend the complex processes involved. This fresh approach helps us understand that transformations in art, literature, and sensibility can be just as explosive and unpredictable as the forces of nature. Changes can often pass by like a whimper but at times they come with a bang, generating effects that are momentous, confusing, even unsettling, and overwhelming.
Within its relatively short life, Nigerian literature has undergone all the three orders of change in the forms of development or at times violent decline which Bradbury and McFarlane associate with movements of history of human art, literature, and thought across vast spans of time. Their key terms and phrases all evoke occurrences anyone conversant with Nigerian literary history should have some familiarity with. The literature of this country has gone through occasional “tremors of fashion that seem to come and go in rhythm with generations”; “the curves that run from first shock to peak activity”; “dying rumbles”; “derivative” imitativeness; “larger displacements”; “extended periods of style and sensibility”; “overwhelming dislocations”; and the “cataclysmic upheavals of the creative human spirit that seem to topple” established traditions, leaving “great areas of the past in ruins.”

Upon reflection, we see that all orders of change boil down to the particularities of the relations that the writers individually and collectively establish with their literary inheritance. They could gently push it forward as it was handed down to them, modify, re-write, copy or mimic, satirize, mock, inflate, cannibalize, or blow it up entirely and introduce a new culture—the choice is theirs, depending on their abilities, predispositions, goals, and purposes.

It is often unquestionably difficult to come to definitive conclusions about the changes, especially while they are still in progress. The seemingly discrete movements may be hard to pin down as they are taking place. However, if observers painstakingly keep their eyes on broad outlines, investigating emerging trends, they can notice patterns; on the one hand, the persistence through the years of familiar literary forms which to some extent loads the dice against seeing literary eras—in Nigerian literature in particular, and elsewhere generally—as anything other than phenomena of shifts in the circumferences, orientations, and objects of textual properties as works are made through the creative alchemy of shedding of old skins. This is the commonest order of change, and it principally involves acceptance of literary inheritance. The building blocks of creative writing—allegory, burlesque, comedy, chant, dirge, elegy, epigram, emblem, metaphor, simile, eulogy, epithalamium, nursery rhyme, fable, hymn, mock epic, incantation, praise, parable, pastoral, proverbs, lyric, lament, lullaby, tragedy, tragi-comedy, sonnet, and the pictorial frame—if not immutable, all transcend time periods. They thus inform the spirits and shape the patterns and sensibilities with which these forms are infused, as well as the degrees of emphases, goals, and objectives of the practice of writing in any context.

Within the climate of continually interlocking patterns of aesthetic and thematic threads running through Nigerian literary history, the present is perpetually shot through with the ubiquity of the past. In this context “current” seems an appropriate critical term to connote some of the flow of ideas, forms, and practices that may take place with no sudden breaks, as old attitudes and manners fade or undergo transmutation with the taking over of new spirits, new angles of vision, perspectives, tasks, objectives, and ends. To a large extent, this is the order W. Jackson Bate calls “the burden of the past” in reference to the

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painful trials of invention that are every aspiring author's good fortune to have because of all the resources of productivity at the command of the forebears. In discussing "what it can mean to the artist to stand in competition with an admired past," Bate therefore acknowledges the difficulties that go hand in hand with the possibilities in the provision made for the perpetuation of tradition: "the intimidating pressures, on the practicing writer, of great models of the past—those great models on whom the writer has naturally been educated" (56).

Of such relationship there is evidence that, while third-generation Nigerian writers all adopt the embryo of works passed down to them by their predecessors, causing the old and the new to collapse into each other, for all intents and purposes, this genre is responding well to the challenge of adjusting that inherited foundation on the fly, modifying it with a massive degree of success. This literature thus primarily straddles several robust traditions, and so generational classification of it is complicated by the fact that literary forms associated with one era or tradition might not necessarily come to a halt and fall out of use with the emergence of another era, although sudden breaks do occasionally happen, as with second-generation literature's areas of separation from its predecessors in many significant dimensions of style. Indeed, as will be shown, the literary forms in use in Nigerian literature generally have no fixed expiration dates, and there are more relatives than absolutes among the distinguishing features of the literature of the periods. The structures display ever-shifting and altered outlines, continually open to either minimal or substantive revisions depending on the abilities and objectives of the artists during the procedures in which each author sets his or her own signature on them. That is the sense in which it is reasonable to talk of gradual modifications.

On the other hand, one fully agrees with Bradbury and McFarlane that radical adjustment or remodeling does occasionally occur. Conventions can gradually shade from one into another in re-fashioning across malleable generational or chronological borderlines, but less often traditions experience instantaneous massive shake-ups in which one abruptly supplants another. It is true that there are no literary forms and topics which are exclusive to one era and are strictly without mixture, which exist in undiluted shapes and vanish into thin air when a new era takes over. However, literary transformations also infrequently take the form of immediate and dramatic displacements in subject matter, temper, and technique.

The fact that orders of change can be defined by publication dates is indisputable; Achebe the author Things Fall Apart, usually considered a landmark foundational text of Nigeria’s first generation, for example, does not belong to the same generation as Achebe the author of his last-known major published work, There Was a Country. The same can also be said of the Soyinka of The Interpreters, a brooding first-generation satirical work on ideas about an imperfect polity and peoples, and the Soyinka of the more relaxed, tongue-in-cheek, and at times celebratory as well as caustically satirical Chronicles from the Land of the Happiest People on Earth. Consequently, to talk of “Achebe’s Periods” and “Soyinka’s Periods” is to acknowledge that if generationally
transformative writers live long enough and remain active in the business of writing for the duration, they can catch the ends or beginnings of eras in which they live their careers, creating works which traverse multiple time spans.

However, as will by now have become evident, the evolutions which inescapably transpire in writing lives are not necessarily unattended by the presence of the past in the present. The processes of renewal which regularly occur in some orders of change habitually embed insights into the ways in which the old is made new within the intersecting patterns of textual features which unavoidably flow through generational blocs. In third-generation literature, the unrestricted circulation of long-established textual features which inescapably move across eras can be quite easily illustrated with Maria Ajima’s deployment of the short story form, for instance. If we take *The Web*, a text in which Ajima draws from properties of the folktale tradition and its reliance on the deus ex machina and the parabolic, as an example, internal evidence suggests a structure built through the blending of resources of orality with the modern story’s brevity and unity of effect. The result is an astonishing measure of variety, as the text grafts concepts from early Soyinka and early Achebe, redeploying them in new contexts with an entirely novel objective. Through the inseparability of these forms, the author ingeniously sets the short story format, by way of the instrumentality of *The Web*, an important task: to articulate her attack on corruption via strategies of characterization, symbolic language, setting, and plot construction that project a portrait of a federation on the brink, so that readers have a stark view of the sketches of happenings there.

In *The Web*, Ajima utilizes pictorial frame, allegory, emblem, quizzical irony, subdued anger, parable, and underhand humor. The story explores the progressive institutionalization of evil as a way of life in a fictional Nigeria, putting in plain view not only the pervasiveness of fraud in the national character and the multidimensional manifestations of its incarnation throughout the entire infrastructure of government, but also the processes of initiation of new inductees into the practice. An imposing picture emerges of a contaminated community, from the very grassroots at local government level, the entrenched doctoring of contracts, the forging of fake contracts and projects, through to the criminality of the republic’s law enforcement, drug peddling by struggling common folk, the duplicity of citizens entrusted with any form of authority, and the subversion of the law by hoodlums. Amidst a general state of insecurity these people will do anything to satisfy their animalistic materialistic urges: ritualists hunting for human beings to decapitate to meet the insatiable demands for human body parts, people seeking to palliate their hunger to make money, the new god that the country worships.

By the time Ajima took on the topics of corruption and ritual execution in Nigeria, both issues had become cancerous. The country was a long way from the days when Achebe and Soyinka tackled the same issues in their respective early works. In Achebe’s novel *A Man of the People*, the conscience of the community had not been completely blunted; and in Soyinka’s play *The Strong Breed*, communal uplift was still the prime object of the annual village scapegoat ritual.
In the aggressive and universal pursuit of money in more recent times, by contrast, corruption is no longer a problem confined to the elite. Dishonesty has infected ordinary people too. In the collapse of the nation state, the human body has been reduced to a piece of merchandise. The disappearance of communal spirit is complete, and the village which once was the seat of communal cultural, economic, political, and social organization has receded into distant memory, replaced by individual atavistic instincts.

This country-wide institutional decline of Nigeria is also metaphorically and literally projected in the diminished status of traditional religion. Of the various changes that have taken place over time, given that religion controls the soul of any community, none is as consequential as the supplanting of the indigenous religions of Nigerian peoples by a new wave of Christian and Islamic fundamentalism. In the past the worship of deities was supreme; in the early first-generation Achebe novel *Arrow of God,* to the extent that the main character Ezeulu, the priest of the deity Ulu, would sacrifice his own life to defend it. But in more recent times we witness the vandalization with impunity of a reincarnated deity’s shrine by former worshipper Ike, the protagonist of Okey Ndibe’s third-generation novel *Foreign Gods, Inc.* Here, Pentecostal Christian charlatans also wreak havoc to a degree hitherto unimaginable, defrauding the gullible devotees of the new religion of money they do not even have, inflicting untold burdens of debt.

Like early Achebe’s *Arrow of God,* Ndibe’s *Foreign Gods, Inc.* is a tour de force in its investigation of the psychology of religious worship, each novel invested with a sense of form, balance, and artistic control. As in Achebe’s book, particularly prominent in Ndibe’s is the ability to venture into the heads of characters, to get to the center of consciousness, and to unveil implacable human willpower. Achebe depicts Ezeulu as a man in devoted loyalty to his religion and society that will stop at nothing to preserve the divinity of a god; similarly, Ndibe ironically characterizes Ike as someone who will allow no obstacle to stand in his way of satisfying his craving for money—the new god. Ike even goes so far as to desecrate a deity in order to attain his own selfish end. While Ezeulu runs completely mad in pursuing his goal of staying true to his community, Ike almost loses his moral sanity in betrayal of his society. How Ezeulu and his descendant Ike conduct themselves in their different circumstances reminds readers of the resplendent quip made by Farouq, a friend of Julius, the bi-racial protagonist of another Nigerian third-generation novel, Teju Cole’s *Open City.* The Moroccan narrates a tale of ironic juxtapositions. Two diametrically opposed ethics emerge in the self-defense philosophies of Al-Qaeda and Hezbollah. Farouq tells a disturbing lesson on coming to terms with danger, ascribing to King Solomon “a teaching about the snake and the bee”—the snake which “defends itself by killing” while “a bee defends itself by dying.” The issue hammered home here, of course, is the fundamental difference in world-view which calls for the adoption of unusual modus operandi capable of meeting the desired objective. One annihilates the self in its method of attack, but the second utterly obliterates the enemy to protect itself.
As will be elaborated in this study, an intriguing pattern is conventionally repeated in great literature. This concerns the over-arching object of making something new, achieved through alteration of tradition, feasting on a precedent. Text-making becomes a site in which to retell an old story because nothing is really “new under the sun,” as an adage has it. An emerging literary composition metaphorically devours an ancestor, its origin or source, reconciling the two apparently divergent methods of self-defense reiterated in Farouq’s observation in Cole’s *Open City*. The rebirth causes the death of the parent in order to come into its own. In this way, a new text brings itself to life through a method one can only call, for lack of a better term, a form of cannibalism. The practice of one text nourished by eating up another, feeding off a relative, becomes recurrent.

Subliminal relationships among texts require a literary-anthropological approach to the study of third-generation Nigerian literature which is scrupulously attentive. A present-day local informant, depending on some of the old forms but reshaped and redeployed in newer contexts, gives vibrant afterlife to echoes of old aesthetic patterns, manners, and other articles inherited from the past. These elements hover and linger on as residuum. The immediate past is never a distant space. The old exists across different time spans simultaneous with the emergence of new patterns. These allow unprecedented originality to shine forth. An illustration is Chika Unigwe’s signifying of Achebe in her novel *On Black Sisters Street*. It will be remembered that in the final pages of the archetypical first-generation Nigerian novel of clash of cultures, Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, the British District Commissioner reacts strongly to the suicide of the novel’s hero Okonkwo and in his view the community’s mishandling of the dead man’s body. That response finds him committed, after “turning to the student of primitive customs,” to a plan to write a book, “The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of The Lower Niger,” with “the story of this man who had killed a messenger and hanged himself.”

The Commissioner’s book was promised. But it was not delivered by him—as far as one can tell. However, it may be fair to say that Achebe effectively wrote a local version of the British colonial administrator’s book in *Things Fall Apart*. In so doing, Nigeria’s founding novelist ironically laid the very foundation of the country’s first-generation literature on the grounds of the truly premier full-scale existential threats its primordial communities faced. Having a focus on responding to colonization and its aftermath, his text recounts the mostly negative consequences that came with it while documenting noteworthy aspects of his native Igbo (Nigerian) culture. If one sees the country as the sum total of the cultures of its constituent, ethnic groups, the substance of Achebe’s novelistic accomplishment is its symbolic significance in gesturing toward the narrative of nation. The nation does not exclude the imported ways of life that are followed. The fact that Achebe wrote not one book but two on the anthropological subject of which the British District Commissioner spoke adds a further notch to his towering achievement in developing the origin of narrational consciousness, the fund of nationalism.
One of these novels is *Arrow of God*, the story of a spiritual leader of his community—Ezulu. Out of devoted service to his deity and his communal office, he refuses the appointment of warrant chiefship offered him by the then colonial administration in an ultimate act of defiance. His act has enabled Achebe to document, in tandem with his telling of Okonkwo’s story in the earlier novel, a manifold history of the resistance that Africans mounted to colonization of their continent. He thus provided a standard against which subsequent Nigerian novels are to be measured in terms not only of technical merit but also of the governing values and behavior of the characters.

Third-generation author Okey Ndibe takes up the challenge thrown down by Achebe. In his novel, *Foreign Gods, Inc.*, he re-writes Achebe’s master-text in a subtle and haunting way, conducting a form of textual repetition and revision; or recycling, as it were. In his reverse story of recolonization, Ndibe has the offspring of the victims of colonial rule put back on themselves the same shackles which their wiser ancestors had fought so hard to shake off. The sinister motives of his novel’s main character Ike are shocking. He jettisons the principles of honor and dignity which motivated Okonkwo and Ezeulu in Achebe’s novels to sacrifice themselves on behalf of their communities. He reflects with numbing accuracy the horror of the warped values which over the years in-between the precursor text and the progeny have taken a firm hold of contemporary Nigeria. Ndibe wrote *Foreign Gods, Inc.* as a pastiche of the discourse of colonial resistance which informs Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*. His act of subversion expands the dialogue on nationalism and patriotism as well as on colonization and its discontents, thereby inviting audiences to read his text and its forerunners together. Both Achebe’s suicides, Okonkwo and Ezeulu, would no doubt look up from their graves (were they able to do so) with consternation at the cruel irony of their descendants, the Ndi Igbo today, like Ike, doing the very reverse: going to any length, even to the desecration of sacred sites, in order to obtain the new insignia of title: money. The older novels are narratives of colonial conquest and failed resistance or the thwarted struggle of African peoples for decolonization; the new novel reads like a parody of the older texts as the story reconstitutes its predecessors with its emphasis on an African people’s voluntary cultural re-entry into the old colonial arrangement in self-surrender to the former colonial masters.

Likewise taking a cue from other writers of her generation, and acting more like an author entrusted with precious tales than a poacher with a different intent, another third-generation novelist, Chika Unigwe, has signified on another first-generation master-text, Cyprian Ekwensi’s *Jagua Nana*. She is an outsider looking in. And she bravely takes on the subject of prostitution in her work of in-depth investigative reporting *On Black Sisters Street*. It is a unique novel: the only work of fiction by an African writer containing an authenticating statement referencing the accounts as documentation of information entrusted to the author for custodianship by real Nigerian women enmeshed in prostitution. These individuals talked to the author about their lives, giving her the permission to write about them. Their yarns expose the most private sectors
of lives that reveal the inner workings of the world’s oldest profession, supplementing the muted male perspectives on the trade offered earlier in Cyprian Ekwenzi’s pioneering depiction of the subject in his tale about the corroding temptations of city life in *Jagua Nana*.

Unigwe’s *On Black Sisters Street* is a true original, often harrowing but an exciting and highly enlightening read. Its subject is comprehensively covered by the author with impressive scope and detail. It deploys cultural studies and sociological investigation in conducting sympathetic observation of a number of prostitutes and reporting on the findings with perspicuity. The subject is one that cries out to be covered. In it, Unigwe joins others such as second-generation writer Catherine Acholonu and Flora Nwapa. She expresses herself adeptly, inserting her writing into the Igbo anthropological novelistic tradition pioneered by Chinua Achebe and extended by those who have come to be known as his sons and daughters in conveying experiences that advocate for the abrogation of customs where all those who call the shots have always been men.

Unigwe goes about planting her writing into the Igbo novelistic tradition through the use of interpolated words and phrases in Igbo with their equivalent English translations. It is significant that such usages come at key moments and passages in the novel. They powerfully lend the authority of tradition to the subjects under deliberation, grounding the swell of the poignant matters implicated in the quest for women’s emancipation in Nigeria. In this she carries over some elements from first- and second-generation literature. As will be demonstrated in this study, she serves as a reminder that we cannot always rigidly pigeonhole writers because the chains linking one generation to another inevitably contain several complex patchworks, patterns structured as a potpourri of disparate elements which mesh into creative connections stressing continuity and innovation: a collage of the makeshift and improvisatory with established convention.

Surely matters are not always quite that simple, and it would be a dereliction of duty if we forget that, in the third order of change, sometimes, if rarely, there may appear a handful of works which, though produced at about the same time within the literature of a nation, remove themselves from the realm of their contemporaries both stylistically and thematically. Such works may be so idiosyncratic that they frustrate the impulse to classify them. These are works that turn everything around them completely upside down. They may exhibit properties either more or less in alignment with some remotely distant predecessors, for instance. But not infrequently they contain features so inventive as to be far ahead of their times. In Irish literature, James Joyce’s *Ulysses* serves as an eye-opening illustration of a work that made such a drastic alteration of Homer that it seemed nothing had paved the way for its emergence. Within the context of African literature, whenever the subject of trailblazing writing comes up the poetry of Christopher Okigbo is repeatedly cited as an example, and for good reason, because of his strident iconoclasm and the way his work apparently overturned the system into which it emerged.
Okigbo’s poetry is like a volcanic eruption. It embodies extreme experimentation; it is the exemplar of a drastic makeover of the structures of poetic expression by a distinctive, towering talent, who first knocked everything down before reassembling the new edifice. We proudly identify Okigbo among Nigeria’s first-generation poets, the pioneering modernists. Yet, apart from the lyrical quality, his audacious imaginativeness, especially in his idiosyncratic verse in *Labyrinths: With Paths of Thunder*, stands so radically alone as to share few major features with those of the works of any other poet of his generation. By the same token, it is remarkable that imitations of Okigbo’s verse reverberate in Nigerian, and in African writing more broadly, to this day. Okigbo’s singularity can easily be confirmed. The contrast between his poetry and that of his contemporaries is vivid. Okibgo lacks, for example, the majestic flamboyance of the John Pepper Clark, in heavily anthologized pieces such as “Okokun,” “Ibadan,” and “Abiku”; the high-flown complexity of the Wole Soyinka of “Telephone Conversation,” his own version of “Abiku,” which is a counter-weight to Clark’s, and his “Death in the Dawn”; the loftiness and grandeur of Gabriel Okara’s “Piano and Drums,” “One Night at Victoria Beach,” and “The Snow Flakes Sail Gently Down,” all collected in his singular book of poems *The Fisherman’s Invocations*, to say nothing of the triteness or dry and humorless tenor of Michael J. C. Echeruo’s *Mortalities* poems and Okogbule Wonodi’s mysticism.21

Obscurantism may be said to be the only element that Okigbo’s verse shares on any sustained or meaningful level with the pieces by his contemporaries. When he is compared in depth with the dynamic Soyinka, in particular, the differences become magnified: whereas the difficulty with Okigbo is referential, primarily because of his wide range of sometimes mysterious allusions and flights of fancy, the thundering Soyinka’s indeterminacy is linguistic on account of his frequently old-fashioned word combinations, inversions, and highly elevated and provocatively wayward thoughts and language. While Soyinka was still enamored with the notion of poetry rigidly composed in conformity to the tradition of the Metaphysical poems of John Milton, John Donne, Andrew Marvell, Henry Vaughan, and Richard Crashaw, Okigbo surreally found his original voice in both the non-esoteric language of ritual or religious worship and the conversational style of the Igbo people. Okigbo, too, can occasionally indulge in word coinage, but in a different frame since he seldom mangles the normal structure of word combinations in his sprightly, fresh, and sparkling use of the English language. Inversion and irregular sentence structures are also rare in Okigbo, if not entirely alien territory.

Christopher Okigbo bucked the trend of the poetry written in his time. He rejected not only uncritical deference to imported convention but also callow obedience to his contemporaries. Once he found his own voice, Okigbo turned toward his ethnic oral forms before any of his comppeers realized their value. Marching in line with what was faddish in poetic composition was not his path. Okigbo’s poetry, naturally, bestrides several eras while always maintaining its distinctiveness. Okigbo’s transcendence over period divides makes it problematic.
to determine to which generation he can be truly considered to belong. It would be a misjudgment either to cocoon him in a clean past or place him only in the present. There is more than a likelihood he will be tied to the future. In like manner no one can rule out the prospect of continuing echoes of his work in the future, as they have haunted the past and continue to haunt the present. All three categorizations therefore can apply in Okigbo's idiosyncratic case: past, present, and a strong possibility of the future. Literary historians have frequently debated to which generation should be attributed the works of authors who are freaks of nature, like Okigbo—artists either so strikingly forward-looking in perspective or consistently engaged in taking backward glances, or who combine both dynamics. Like the Igbo minstrel it is hard to consign them to any specific time period.22

The foregoing discussion may have given the impression that, in factoring in generational boundaries, delimiting thematic and stylistic patterns can be protean, whether from a broad view or a streamlined perspective. Since there are few if any undiluted elements which are not carried over across time, in light of literary structures' border-crossing proclivities, this could lead one to wonder how helpful such generational placement of writers may be, particularly for authors who are amenable to categorization within the multiple eras into which their works cross over. How useful is generational classification if it depends on the often-unstable perspectives of readers, on the vagaries of angles of reader perception?

This author's own view on this is that occasional moments of quibbling should not discourage us from the search for elements that account for period divides, whether they remain embedded in the matrix of texts or are sitting prominently on the surface for the reader to access. We must persist in this pursuit as a painstaking labor of love. Period divides may be largely arbitrary constructions, but readers still risk distorting the integrity of texts if they deny or overlook their contexts of production, the surrounding sources of influence, or the predominant elements which typically accompany these literary time capsules.

While bearing in mind the fluidity of timelines involving art works in a state of flux with variously inflected modes and the difficulties in drawing the boundaries of generations, when all things are considered there is clearly a case for pegging the development of the genre now called Nigeria’s third-generation literature to the late 1980s.23 Within this context, one can indeed reasonably take the 1988 publication of the ANA (Association of Nigerian Authors) poetry volume edited by Harry Garuba, *Voices from the Fringe,*24 as marking a milestone in the formal national emergence of this venture. The caveat is that the volume includes several well-known writers who are now identified as members of the second generation—Phanuel Egejuru, Tunde Fatunde, Sam Ukala, and Dubem Okafor, among others—clear testimony of how amorphous generic outlines or how gradual generational shifts can often be. They may be so thin as to be not immediately as distinct as scholars might expect or want them to be, or they can be problematic to ascertain at all, especially at their formative stages. In these early days the cumulative details have not yet fully coalesced around blocks of issues and techniques, and scholars must begin to configure the
changes which are beginning to establish themselves. But it remains clear that
the maturing of the genre of Nigeria’s third-generation literature revolved
around the 1980s.

It must be conceded, however, that the publication of the Garuba/ANA
volume, as august an offering as it is, was only a harvest, albeit a bountiful one,
of quietly emergent creative efforts spread across the country in the years prior.
There is no question that it signified a watershed moment in the official re-
cognition by one of the country’s major literary organizations, the Association of
Nigerian Authors, of the evolution of writing by a new crop of writers, such that
its role in the acceptance and popularization of the genre of Nigeria’s third-
generation literature should not be understated. It is a grievous over-
simplification, nonetheless, when scholars definitively attribute the establish-
ment of this branch of Nigerian literature to the work of any one individual or
any one specific region of the country.

This deeply troubling error of oversimplification is precisely what many
emerging Nigerian critics seem to be making. This is not entirely to be un-
expected in a society habituated to deifying obas, emirs, imams, spiritual leaders,
and chiefs, now hungry for cultural heroes to celebrate. The misattribution to a
single individual and to a specific location as providing the chief impetus for a
wind that at the time was blowing across the entire country, East and West,
North and South, including the Middle Belt region, however, is self-serving and
wrong-headed in the extreme. So is another exaggeration that locates the city of
Ibadan as “the acclaimed meeting point for the main actors of the cultural re-
naissance of postcolonial Anglophone Africa.”25 These people are certainly
creating their own realities, and they do not tally with the actual truth.

This writer was living and working at Ahmadu Bello University, in Zaria,
during the flowering of third-generation literature in the 1980s. As that wind of
change in Nigerian literature was sweeping across the country, he felt it in the
air then and participated in it, and will return to the subject momentarily. But it
might be profitable to first spend some time on a more distant past and the
undue prominence given to Ibadan as the heart of artistic creativity in English-
speaking Africa in the formative stages of modern African literature in English
during the 1960s and the early 1970s. It is paramount to clear this error, which is
so egregious that it completely flies in the face of the publicly documented facts.

We might begin by pointing out that Okot p’Bitek, who wrote two of the most
outstanding poetry volumes to have graced African literature in English in this
era, *Song of Lawino* and *Song of Okot* (1970) and *Horn of My Love* (1974), for
example, was not a presence at Ibadan.26 Neither did Ibadan play any part in
nurturing Taban Lo Liyong, author of *Fixons* and Frantz Fanon’s *Uneven Ribs*,27
among many others; and the notable novelist Ngugi wa Thiong’o, one of
Africa’s greatest writers, who launched the modern East African novel in
English with the publication in quick succession of his *Weep Not, Child* (1964),
*The River Between* (1965), and *A Grain of Wheat* (1967), did not get a head start
at Ibadan.28 Not even Lenrie Peters, practicing surgeon, poet, and novelist from
the neighboring West African country of the Gambia, had any Ibadan roots or
affiliations, but he would go on to help establish the foundation of the modern
literature of his country with the 1965 publication of his novel *The Second
Round* and a series of important poems, including "Homecoming," part of his
1967 poetry volume *Satellites.* From Ghana, of course, Ayi Kwei Armah of *The
Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* fame was not at Ibadan, nor was Kofi
Awoonor, author of *This Earth, My Brother.* One can go on and on: the list of
Anglophone African writers who made an imprint in the 1960s and 1970s
without any connection to Ibadan is endless. All this hype, the sparkling and
attractive fantasy of Ibadan as the nerve center of the African literary re-
naissance, under which so many have fallen, is totally nonsense.

It must be granted that some of the key figures at the foundation of modern
Nigerian literature, such as Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Mabel Segun,
Molora Ogundipe-Leslie, Christopher Okigbo, and John Pepper Clark-
Bekederemo all have roots in Ibadan during that time. But we should not forget
that artistic creativity flourished at centers of learning in other parts of Nigeria
too, as it did at several major centers of higher education across the entirety of
English-speaking Africa. Prominent among these eruptions within Nigeria were
activities of the Nsukka arts movement and the Zaria arts school, the first
degree-awarding art institution in Nigeria. The works of Chike Aniakor and
Obiora Udechukwu in Nsukka, and S. Irein Wangboje, Bruce Onobrakpeya,
Demas Nwoko, Uche Okeke, Jimo Akolo, S. A. Adetoro, Richard Baye, L. T.
Bentu, Dele Jegede, and later James Ewule, Tonie Okpe, and Kolade Oshinowo,
and others in Zaria, clearly belie the impression that there was only one center
which could be considered the colony of high literary culture for Nigerian and
African writers and artists.

Beyond the shores of Nigeria, other hubs of artistic creativity flourished in
Africa during this period, at Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda, and later
at the University of Nairobi, in East Africa. The most famous literary event of
the era, the monumental hosting of the first Conference of African Literature
on the continent in 1962, took place at Makerere. It was subsequently followed
by the high-energy cultural work surrounding the activities in Nairobi of Okot
p'Bitek and a group of three scholars, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Henry Owuor-
Anyumba, Taban Lo Liyong, and young patrons of the arts such as David Cook
and James Gibbs as well as Michael Etherton and John Reed at the University of
Zambia. This is to say nothing of the historic cultural activity reported in an-
other West African country, at Fourah Bay College in Sierra Leone by Eldred
Durosimi Jones in his last published major work, *The Freetown Bond.* In a
nutshell, there were centers for the grooming of artists all over Africa during the
ferment of independence movements, among which the Ibadan project was just
one example, as important as it undoubtedly has turned out to be.

When one turns to 1980s Nigeria, specifically, undoubtedly the dominant
literary occurrence—the emergence of third-generation literature—was a na-
tional movement in which many actors and locations spread across the length
and breadth of the country were active participants. Unquestionably, to mis-
attribute a commanding role to any single location and individual actor as the
originators of this genre is to miscomprehend Nigeria’s literary history completely, and to fail to give careful attention to the flowering of this literature. The bogus claim cannot even pass the litmus test of ordinary commonsense. Indeed, the overblown claims made for Ibadan and any specific individual there at the time clearly do not reflect well on home-based African academic journal publishing, for how such an outlandish claim comes to be peddled in the pages of a journal that touts itself as a reputable academic publishing outlet without being caught by the peer-reviewing process is embarrassing. This author would, of course, not be surprised if a colossal error such as this was in fact brought to the attention of a journal’s editor yet was overruled, having had an unforgettable experience recently when a South Africa-based journal sent him an article to review. As one of two reviewers who had rejected the article, the editor wrote to inform him that a third reviewer had accepted the submission, and so the editor had gone ahead by using the editorial chair’s vote to break what the email referred to as “the tie” in favor of publication. He still cannot understand the arithmetic of a “tie” when two out of three readers are on one side of a recommendation, but he is keenly aware that these are unusual times in academic publishing. With the mushrooming of run-for-profit academic journals and the pressure to sustain high-profile academic careers into which journal editorships propel scholars, too many of the publishing outlets now open to Nigeria’s fourth-generation critics, working under a publish-or-perish syndrome, are simply looking to fill up their pages—annual and quarterly subscriptions must be fulfilled. Notwithstanding, this disastrous situation of sub-standard ethics in journal publishing should not in any way absolve authors of culpability for their own errors, and so it would be remiss not to reiterate that Nigeria’s third-generation literature did not originate at Ibadan. And just as no one specific site can lay claim to being the exclusive treasure-house of talent, no one individual was the fountainhead of inspiration.

It must, nevertheless, be acknowledged that the Nsukka group of writers has legitimate claims to have participated in the collective national origin and formation of this genre of Nigerian literature. So does the Zaria group of writers. Literary activities one can only describe as robust took place at the time in writing workshops there, leading to a rush of publications of many excellent materials by both students and faculty in the journals Work in Progress and Saiwa, and the English Literary Association student journal Kuka housed in the Department of English at the Ahmadu Bello University. Noteworthy among those who gave their creative writing an early hearing in Saiwa, for example, should be mentioned Ghanaian playwright Ama Ata Aidoo, who published three poems—“Now That the Weather Man is Gone Crazy,” “Heavy Traffic,” and “From the Only Speech that was not Delivered at the Rally”—in the maiden issue of the journal in 1984. The Malawian poet Jack Mapanje made an appearance in issue number 4 (1987) with his piece “Smiller’s Bar,” as did the critic, novelist, and poet J.O.J. Nwachukwu-Agbada, who had his poem “Tears of Laughter” printed there; also, Femi Ayebode, with the piece entitled “Poem”; and the then-fledgling poet Niyi Osundare, who contributed “Echoes from the
Rural Abyss” to the same issue. The Okella magazine, which later became the official mouthpiece of the Creative Writers Workshop, a campus-wide student organization, offered another publication outlet for new work from both within and outside the Ahmadu Bello University campus.

There was also a similar kindling of the creative spark at other universities around the country, at Ife and Lagos, then Nigeria’s other main centers of higher education, soon to be joined by the University of Benin and the University of Calabar. The list of contributors to the Garba/ANA volume Voices from the Fringe speaks volumes in itself about the national character of the creative temper. Indeed, the title of the collection was something of a misnomer, because verse published in newspapers across the nation at this time demonstrated the dominance of the free verse form, which had wholly replaced the regular meter of the poetry of the preceding era. In hindsight, the poetry collected in that volume was at the center of the national consciousness in Nigeria and anything but on the fringe.

In general, people were tired of elite poetry, and so the most dramatic artistic innovations took place during the earliest phase of third-generation literature in the new poetry. The emerging writers dispensed with conventional English and regular meters entirely in favor of unrhymed compositions, in pidgin on occasion, and irregular verse lines conspicuously employing the language of everyday conversation. They were not content with just challenging the received notions of standard English and regular meter as vehicles of poetic composition associated with the blank verse of their predecessors. In the article, “Resisting Repression in Nigeria: The Lyric Poetry of Femi Osofisan,” situating the artistic transformation in progress during this era in its socio-economic and political context, this writer outlined the following conditions as the raw combustible elements which were to light the creative fires for two consecutive generations of Nigerian writers:

Nigeria gained political independence from the UK in October 1960 but the military have ruled for over twenty of the thirty-five years of the country’s post-independence history. The first military coup, by General Aguyi Ironsi, took place barely six years after independence, on 15 January 1966. When Ironsi was overthrown in a counter coup in July 1966, another officer, then Lt Colonel (later Major General) Yakubu Gowon came to power. Gowon’s nine-year-rule was terminated by the coup of General Murtala Mohammed in 1975. When Murtala Mohammed was killed in the unsuccessful coup of Lt Colonel S.D. Dimka of 13 February 1976, his second-in-command, General Olusegun Obasanjo, took power and ruled until October 1979, when he handed over power to the first elected civilian president of the country, Alhaji Shehu Shagari. Upon re-election for a second term of office, Shagari was ousted from power by the coup that brought General Buhari and Brigadier Idiagbon into the limelight in 1983. On 27 August 1985 the nation was again shocked with the news of another coup, when General Ibrahim Babangida ended the rule of Buhari and
Idiagbon. Babangida stepped aside on 25 August 1993, only to be replaced six months later by his former colleague, General Sani Abacha, who is now holding on tenaciously to power.

Throughout the period of military rule, but especially during the Buhari and Babangida eras, the soldiers projected themselves as powerful, benevolent leaders who were in power to “restore law and order” and, above all, were themselves beyond the rule of law. Every form of dissension was banned. In practice, the military (mis)rule was marked with ostentatious lifestyles and outrageous displays of wealth by the junta, escalation of corruption in national life, reckless embezzlement of public funds, nepotism, favoritism, patronage, godfatherism and an abysmally low morale among the general populace, the majority of whom were uneducated, unemployed and destitute.

The unrest prevalent during the Babangida dictatorship spread desperation, confusion, fear, panic, and social and economic insecurity, as well as tyranny. The turbulence gave Nigeria’s third-generation fiction its creative spark, although its vehicle as an institution for engagement with history was a legacy that it inherited from first- and second-generation writings. The distinguishing marker of this expression is the exilic angst that it brings to the exploration of life for its protagonists. The turmoil led to the flight not only of Nigerian academics but of the expatriate faculty in many Nigerian universities, also creating a huge subject for third-generation writing. This was the setting in which Nigeria’s third-generation literature was birthed, some of it also utilizing pidgin, the lingua franca of the uneducated people, in an unabashed show of solidarity with these underprivileged elements.

In Zaria, for instance, the 1988 publication of Egwugwu Illah’s pidgin poem, under the title “Kabukabu,” rode on the wave of this movement. Illah’s “Kabukabu” was the foster child of one of the most challenging moments in Nigeria’s then short time as an “independent” country. It was a time of near-total collapse of all the institutions of government and witnessed economic disenfranchisement of the working class and the high-handed dictatorship of a military junta, which later turned in the uniforms and camouflaged itself under civilian clothes but continued to operate the same policies. Oil gloom and environment degradation were other rampant human rights abuses. Illah’s “Kabukabu” arose from the work of the Zaria Creative Writers Workshop, where the author’s prodigious talent was first noticed:35

I no blame di man
Sam-sam
Di time e been buy dis 305
E take anoda loan
From first bank
Abi na UBA Sef
Take join am
Before him money reach
To give the Peugeot distributor.

Now nko?
Na two times
Dem de commot money
From im salary
College commot dem own
Bank too follow
Not to talk PAYE,
Housing
And ‘economic recovery’.

Before e fit recover
Na Kaduna be dat
E go get 8–9 Lecture
Kon run Kaduna 10–11
Den come back for im 12-1 tutorial
So if tyre no burst
Or police delay am
To show im paticula
E go fit ‘make ends meet’ (86)

Topically, Illah’s “Kabukabu” covers all but one of the central concerns of the
genre of Nigerian literature soon to acquire the appellation “third generation,”
though it anticipates that loudly missing topic—immigration—implicitly as
well, particularly the flight of academics in droves looking for better lives outside
the country because of the intolerable economic and social conditions at home.
The author, Egwugwu Illah, was then a lecturer in the former Department of
English and Drama at Ahmadu Bello University. The poem captures eerily the
horror stories of the hustle and shuttle of academics for survival under the
terrible economic atmosphere of the Babangida era. The title of this poem refers
to the illegal use of private vehicles by citizens of the country for the commercial
purpose of public transportation. The poem evokes the sense of the extreme
nightmare of lecturers struggling unsuccessfully to stretch their meager salaries
to meet basic necessities, forced to find supplementary sources of income by
taking on the role of taxi drivers using their own cars to move passengers around
while juggling this work with their teaching, which unavoidably took a de-
vastating hit.

“Kabukabu” became a favorite pastime for many academics, not only at
Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, but across the entire country of Nigeria,
especially those from one-income families. Because there was such extreme
difficulty in obtaining credit, it took not only herculean effort but almost needed
a miracle to get one. Interestingly, of the two banks where the lecturer in the
poem secures the requisite multiple loans, “First Bank” and “UBA,” the latter
was particularly notorious for the long lines of lecturers queuing up along its
corridors for hours on end in search of overdraft loans from month to month between one payday and the next, only for the manager to reject their petitions outright. The poem’s snide remark, “UBA Sef,” is a swipe at the harshness of the bank’s disdainful treatment of intellectuals. This bank’s notoriety for not responding sympathetically to the pain of the lecturers reflects in a nutshell the attitude of the military authorities at the helm of affairs of the country. The multiple car loans secured by the lecturer in the poem would have required an enormous exertion of energy to obtain. But the sourcing of these loans was not followed by any reprieve at all because the repayment that the borrower must now provide involves immediately carefully balancing it against the liquidation of his other debts. Among these were automatic payroll deductions of University Housing Rentals for faculty living on campus housing, all of which follow after the massive hole dug into the salary by the bank’s installment payments. Alongside these payments are the mandatory “PAYE” (“PAY AS YOU EARN”) graduated house charge and the “Economic recovery” which refers to an unpopular levy attached to the aid package requirements of the World Bank’s IMF (International Monetary Fund) Structural Adjustment Programme instituted by the repressive regime of Babangida on the country. Civil servants and lecturers bore the brunt of the IMF debt.

Police corruption—call it police brutality, what many now see as the unofficial violence of the state, later featured at greater length in Maria Ajima’s short stories—was implicated as well in the obstacle the lecturer had to contend with because law enforcement officers too were scavenging for survival. These parasites wrested bribes from road users by demanding what was called “particular” or appropriate official registration papers for commercial vehicles, which they knew all too well owners using their private cars as “kabukabu” could not possibly have. The poem references the operational procedure of the Peugeot Motor Vehicle Plant. The Peugeot plant was located in Kaduna, no more than 50 kilometers from the university town of Zaria, but the company prohibited the direct sale of its products to customers, thus requiring the prospective customers instead to buy the vehicles through mercenary car distributor networks. Often these dealers were located hundreds of miles away from the intended buyers, and third-party buying also came with grossly inflated prices to allow the distributors to maximize their own profits. Using any vehicle obtained through such a torturous process was an act of will, but the use of the Peugeot 305 model, the smallest family sedan and a symbol of financial struggle, for commercial purposes was a measure of this lecturer’s ultimate desperation. By Nigerian standards at the time, the Peugeot 305 was the antithesis of the luxury Peugeot 505 used by the elite and later as long-distance cabs. The constant fear of a burst tire arose because of the treacherous conditions of Nigerian roads, with their crater-sized potholes rearing up so frequently and unexpectedly that a driver would try to dodge them at his or her own peril.

Illah’s “Kabukabu,” therefore, defined the mood of an era and encapsulates the style of the literature being written particularly across college and university campuses. Around the time of its publication, Ezenwa-Ohaeto, then a
lecturer at the Anambra State College of Education, in Eastern Nigeria, also published his slim poetry book collection, *I wan bi president: poems in formal and pidgin English* (1988).\(^{36}\)

Among the other individuals that also similarly made their publishing debuts there, exploiting these escalating socio-economic and political states of morass, a former Ahmadu Bello University English Department student, who later became the editorial director of the Ahmadu Bello University Press, Audee T. Giwa, is deserving of special mention, as someone who went on to write the promising novel *I'd Rather Die*, a tale of the fatally injurious effects of the new commercialism on love.\(^{37}\) The established poet John Haynes, a British national then lecturing in the School of Basic Studies and the English Department at Ahmadu Bello University, joined the fray, writing under the pen name of Idi Bukar and conceptualizing the economic and socio-political devastation of the country in the image of a drought rapaciously ravaging the homeland in his impressive self-published poetry volume, *First the Desert Came and Then the Torturer*.\(^{38}\)

*First the Desert Came and Then the Torturer* is an extended poem composed using the formula of T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*,\(^{39}\) a modernist work of literary expression with which Bukar’s free verse bears much resemblance. One of the movements is entitled “Words” and refers in a concrete sense to the deep troubles of the times spiraling out of control:

They jailed intellectuals  
They shot workers and students  
They imported electronic equipment from Brazil  
with instructions for the Torturer  

As the poor got thinner  
they shouted the slogans louder  

In the noise  
the silence came  
a dispersed rustle of textbook pages  

In the sentence no-one was permitted to utter  
or copy  
or even know  
the words began to mean  

In their whispered sound  
in the shapes of their letters  
in their very ink  
the screams of life had been placed.\(^{40}\)

Here, utilizing parallel verse lines and suggestive, carefully selected words and image-laden language to powerful effect, Bukar rummages through the issues of the times. He begins with the persecution of intellectuals. This was particularly